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**School Speech-Language Pathologist and Audiologist Task Force Report**

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**The Background:**

The State Department of Education Division of Special Education and the Tennessee Association of Administrators of Special Education (TASSE) Board of Directors requested the State Board of Education address a serious problem, the lack of personnel available to provide the speech language services required to meet the needs of students eligible for special education. Currently the state wide number of personnel meeting the criteria to work in a school setting as a school speech language pathologist and are available and willing to work for school districts are inadequate.

At the request of the Board the Department of Education formed a task force to address the shortage of service providers in speech language. To provide the personnel to deliver necessary speech-language services to students the task force decided to explore changing the current service delivery model. This report provides a summary of the work of the task force aimed at revising how speech language services are provided to students in Tennessee.

**The Recommendation:**

For information purposes only; no action required.

At the October 2004 board meeting the Department of Education, Division of Special Education proposed the following actions.

1. Amend Rule 0520-2-4-.12 **Requirements for Professional School Service Personnel**; add Professional Speech-Language Pathologist; Place school speech-language pathologists and Audiologists who have at least a master's degree or master's equivalency and passed the appropriate Praxis exam on the system wide personnel salary schedule rather than a teacher salary schedule.
2. Amend Rule 0520-2-3-.01 **Licensure, General Requirements**; add a section that would clarify the requirements to be designated as a Professional Speech-Language Pathologist. Eliminate added educational requirements for those with a master's or master's equivalent degree in Speech Language Pathology and have passed the Praxis Speech Language Pathology test with at least a 600.
3. Amend Rule 0520-1-2-.02 **Kinds of Recognized Experience**; allow that verified satisfactory speech and language pathology experiences outside of the school setting may be counted for salary purposes if approved by the local director of schools.
4. Amend Rule 0520-2-4-.02(1) and 0520-2-4-.03(1)(a) **Alternative A License**; allow up to four renewals for speech-language teachers making significant progress toward a master's degree.
5. Amend Rule 0520-2-2-.21 **Job Descriptions, Speech/Language Specialist**; Eliminate the Speech/Language Specialist job position and create job descriptions for both Professional Speech Language Pathologist and another for Speech Language teacher.
6. Require SBE staff and SDE staff to **establish a task force** to develop a Speech Language service delivery model for Tennessee. The model should address the roles of different speech language personnel, job responsibilities, supervision and professional development. Include strategies for recruiting, training and retaining personnel. Present completed report to the Board before July 1, 2005.

The board approved items one through four. The board recommended a task force be formed to study and develop a proposal for board approval.

A task force was formed and met for the first time June 15-16. Task force members include practicing school based speech language pathologists, members of the speech language professional association, university speech language and audiology professors, representatives of the Department of Education and the State Board of Education.

The task force has reached a tentative consensus on a proposed service delivery model for Tennessee. The completed model will align with the American Speech and Hearing Association (ASHA), meet the requirements of the Tennessee Board of Communication

Disorders, meet the Medicaid Fee for Service guidelines, and will increase the availability of services, maintain high quality, and may reduce costs to school districts.

The task force is developing the following proposal for a speech language service delivery model in Tennessee:

Level I: Speech Language Pathologist (SLP), with a Professional School Service Personnel License (PSSP).

Will be qualified to supervise Speech Language Therapy Assistants\* (SLTAs\*) and paraprofessionals. They will provide diagnostic and therapeutic services, develop and insure the implementation of IEP's.

To be eligible for PSSP licensure one must:

1. Be licensed as a speech-language pathologist by the Board of Examiners of Speech Pathology and Audiology.

or

2. Have a master's degree in speech-language pathology from a state or regionally accredited institution of higher education with a speech-language graduate level program approved by the American Speech Hearing Association. They must also achieve a passing score on the assessment required by the State Board of Education.

or

3. Be a speech-language teacher who has a master's degree or master's equivalence in speech-language pathology and holds a valid Tennessee teacher license with a speech-language endorsement and meets the requirements of 0520-1-2-.03.

Level II: Speech Language Therapy Associate (SLTA), with a bachelor's or associates degree in speech language or communications disorders and have supervised clinical experience.

Will be qualified to carry out what is recommended on an IEP under "proper supervision". Proper supervision of SLTAs: 30% Direct/Indirect Supervision for the first 90 days and 20% direct/indirect supervision thereafter.

To be eligible for Speech Language Therapy Associate one must:

- A. Have completed a bachelor's level speech language or communications disorders program and had a supervised clinical experience.

or

- B. Have a bachelor's degree plus speech language courses and a supervised clinical experience.

or

- C. Have completed a two year associate's degree program in speech language (new State Board Standard) consistent with the requirements of the Board of Examiners of Speech Pathology and Audiology requirements.

Level III: Speech language paraprofessional, standard teacher assistant duties. Cannot perform any therapy, can screen, provide practice activity if trained to do so, and perform functions as assigned by the SLP.

It is recommended that the model be initially implemented with a supervision limit of one (1) SLTA for each SLP. This ratio, it is estimated, will allow for an increase in the availability of services up to 70% (not 100% because 30% necessary for supervision and increased paperwork load). This recommendation will guarantee continued quality during initial implementation. The task force should continue to monitor implementation of the model and make recommendations to adjust supervision level to 2 or more, depending on results.

The task force is developing licensure standards and job descriptions for the positions required to implement this model.